

Barth Society Met in Toronto, November 22-23, 2002

Our meeting in Toronto featured a Friday afternoon session from 4:00 P.M. to 6:30 P.M. and a Saturday morning session from 9:00 A.M. to 11:30 A.M. Both were held in the Toronto Convention Center. On Friday afternoon the theme was *Barth on Beauty: The Ambivalence of Reformed Aesthetics*. Garrett Green of Connecticut College presented the first paper and David Demson of the University of Toronto presented the second. On Saturday morning the theme was *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity* (T & T Clark/ Continuum, 2002) by Paul D. Molnar. Cynthia Rigby of Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary and Jeffrey Hensley of Virginia Theological Seminary were the presenters and Paul Molnar of St. John's University, New York was the respondent.

BARTH ON BEAUTY by Garrett Green

Garrett Green began by mentioning his youthful experiences of the differences between Lutheran and Reformed Churches in Europe noting that the former had statues, stained glass and crucifixes while the latter, which had none of these, had empty Gothic spaces with the pulpit as the center. After mentioning two recent books on theological aesthetics, one by Richard Viladesau and the other by Frank Burch Brown, that invoke Karl Barth's love of Mozart to suggest what could be described as an "aesthetic theodicy" Green says their focus sheds little light on Barth's substantive theological aesthetics and "none at all on the crucial issue for Reformed theology, the visual arts." Green then explored that meaning by focusing on Barth's theology of beauty as a divine perfection in *CD II/1*.

Following the Calvinist tradition Barth begins by treating beauty with "a reserve that verges on suspicion" insisting that beauty is not a central concept but a "secondary" and "auxiliary" one. Nonetheless Barth insists that something must be said about the fact that God is beautiful. After noting the structure of *CD II/1* and rehearsing Barth's arrangement of the six pairs of divine perfections which include the "perfections of divine love" (grace and holiness, mercy and righteousness, patience and wisdom) and the "perfections of divine freedom" (unity and omnipresence, constancy and omnipotence, eternity and glory) Green said that beauty is treated in the context of God's glory. This is important because Barth's aesthetics come into view by the way he stresses God's glory as the perfection in and through which all of God's other perfections come

clearly into view. In order to explain his view of beauty then Barth first explains the meaning of God's glory as the reality of God that manifests itself—the nature of God as one who wills to make himself known. What emerges from this, according to Green, is "a kind of economy of divine glory, encompassing the creator, the creature and the relationship between them." The content of the divine glory of course is the essence of God himself. But what of the form of God's glory? Barth believes that God becomes "transitive" rather than remaining immanent so that "The joy that is immanent in God's being expresses itself outwardly in the creature." How does this occur? What form does it take? From the fact *that* God is glorious Barth proceeds to answer the question *how* God is glorious. That is the question of beauty: God's revelation is beautiful and that makes it a persuasive quality of his revelation. Barth insists that God's glory is invariably connected with joy both in the Bible and in the medieval tradition so that, in addition to awe and reverence, it also awakens "happiness, joy, pleasure, desire and enjoyment." But according to Green this "also" which refers to the form and shape of God's glory, and the idea that it is "only" a question of form threatens to undermine Barth's carefully constructed theology of glory. The implication is that the divine beauty might only be an *appearance* while the real content of God's glory needs to be sought elsewhere. Of course Barth explicitly rejects any such "aesthetic docetism." But Green believes that his "also" and "only" speak louder than this rejection. Barth insists that while God is beautiful we cannot allow this to have any independent significance.

Why then was Barth so guarded in his treatment of the divine beauty? Perhaps he was concerned with a Platonism that would substitute Beauty for the self-revealing God as the basis of theological truth. In any case Garrett Green's thesis is that Barth's ambivalence about God's beauty "springs from a failure to abide by his own theological priorities." Green believes that Barth's Christocentric theology which led him to Jesus Christ as the one who discloses human nature in all its possibilities should have led him to understand God's beauty without the ambivalence that marks his view. Green considers a passage from Augustine, which Barth may have considered tinged with the Platonism evident in Pseudo-Dionysius, in order to stress that Augustine should have been lured to God by God's beauty but instead was seduced by creaturely beauty. According to Green, Augustine did not understand this in a Platonic way with human beauty simply a reflection of the divine beauty. While Green admits that Christology played a definite role in Barth's treatment of God's glory, he also believes that Barth failed to see "the implications of this Christology for his ambivalence about the concept of beauty." What then is the true source of Barth's ambivalence here? Could it have been Barth's focus on Jesus as the Suffering Servant in whom God's beauty was hidden? Green concludes that Barth's ambivalence is traceable to his view of the relationship between the cross and resurrection. When one gazes on the crucified Christ how is one to see that as beautiful? How is one to know that God's glory is there revealed? And Barth's answer is that God can only be known through God.

By applying a Christological basis for grasping the divine beauty to Barth's concern about how God might be called beautiful Green seeks to clarify matters. The problem is not that beauty might be an inappropriate attribute for God. Rather it is that God "hides his beauty from us in order to become one with us." That is why Barth's emphasis on the "also" and "only" is misplaced: God is not also beautiful. The whole being of God is beautiful by nature. According to Green, God did not "also" become human "only" as a matter of form. How then should God's beauty be perceived?

At the end of his treatment Green says Barth drops a "bombshell" by objecting to any artistic attempt to capture the image of Christ. The genuine image, Barth says, cannot be copied again "because, also in its beauty, it speaks for itself!" In this respect Green believes Barth has not moved far from Calvin, although Calvin himself was not opposed to all images, and Barth too offers hints of a more affirmative theological aesthetics. Green ends his paper with four theses: 1) "Christian theology may understand art *hermeneutically*: not as idolatry but rather as *interpretation* of

the biblical witness." Here we can learn more from what Barth does than from what he says: he refers to two paintings from Grünewald's Isenheim Altar to present what he considers proper images of revelation. One does not worship the image but God to whom the image points; 2) "Christian theology may understand art *doxologically*." Art is not the object of worship but can be an act of worship when it responds thankfully to the God of glory. Artistic creativity can be seen as the aesthetic mode of "the grateful creature to his glorious creator;" 3) "Christian theology may understand art *analogically*." Visual art can be understood as a kind of visual metaphor that enables the worshiper to "imagine the beauty of God metaphorically;" 4) Finally art may be understood "*eschatologically*." Perhaps the visual arts might serve "as the eyes of faith, the media of eschatological vision" by depicting what a world transformed by grace might look like as a proleptic glimpse of the time when God will be seen face to face.

David Demson's Response to Garrett Green

After complimenting Garrett Green on the freshness of his approach to a question that has not received a lot of attention, David Demson questioned Green's use of two words: "grudgingly" and "bombshell" suggesting that Barth did not grudgingly speak of God's beauty and that it is no bombshell when Barth requests visual artists to refrain from portraying visual images of the Incarnate Son of God. In order to accomplish this Demson summarized Barth's treatment of the subject in *CD II/1*.

First, God's glory is the joy of his inner divine being which we may echo in the temporal sphere as we wait upon God's revelation without attempting to coax it by creating our own picture of that reality. What then does the Bible mean when it speaks of God's glory? Is it just a brute fact? God's beauty refers to the way God himself is: God is divinely beautiful in his unique way and is therefore "pleasant, desirable, full of enjoyment [and when He acts] gives pleasure, creates desire and rewards with enjoyment." Joy then is the form of God's glory by which God is persuasive and convincing in his revelation.

Demson then presented three answers Barth provides to the question of what it is that is beautiful in God that makes him the object of our joy. First, when Barth refers to beauty as the form of God (of the persuasive and convincing element in his revelation), he insists that because it is God's own form, therefore God really is beautiful; it is the form that God takes, and this form, Demson says, is necessary to his life and belongs to it, although it is not something in itself. The creature cannot give form to God through pictorial representations. Still, God radiates the joy of his own Godhead and thus

releases joy to creatures through his persuasive and convincing form which must be called his beauty. Second, the form of God's being is not abstract form in itself but the concrete form of the triune God. As such and by virtue of *perichoresis* the divine being draws from its triune life both its inner perfection and the outer perfection of its form. Because the triune life of God is identical with itself and non-identical, simple and multiple, a life of movement and of peace, this particular content brings about the specific form of the divine being. The triune God himself is the basis of the power and dignity of the divine being and of his self-declaration and glory, so that God himself is the basis of what makes his power and dignity enlightening and convincing to us. That is the function of his form—it radiates joy and thus attracts us and overcomes resistance. It is beautiful in that it reflects the triune being of God, not in a material way so that a triad might be found in it, but formally; God's triunity is the secret of his beauty. Any pictorial representation would simply be a triad. Third, God becomes human by assuming the humanity of fallen creatures so that he might exalt them through his own humiliation. God confirms his own unity in differentiation in this act. His glory occurs in this act of his self-declaration. According to Demson his "outer work is the image of his inner life" which no pictorial image could represent and that work, just as God's inner life, is the real unity of God's being which has this beautiful form that arouses joy. The beautiful form of God's being is indeed reflected in the relation between Jesus' humanity and divinity and as it radiates outwards we "may and *must* recognize the beauty of God in Jesus Christ." God's mercy, love and unity disclosed in Jesus Christ is indeed the beauty of God himself that can only be known through God. Demson notes that Barth recalls Isa. 53:2-3 to answer what the beautiful element in God is that makes him the object of our joy. For Barth Christ is present under this aspect of humiliation and suffering first and it is not self-evident that this form has beauty; who really seeks God's beauty in Christ crucified? Who sees that this one who was abased is the exalted one who is truly God? God's glory and beauty shine out in this unity and differentiation. God's beauty is known in this movement from the ugly to the beautiful and the power to know this can only come from revelation. This is the face of God's loving-kindness. "No other face bespeaks at the same time the human suffering of the true God and the divine glory of the true human" and no artist can depict this particular beauty of God because the one true picture which reflects its proper object cannot be copied since it speaks for itself, "even in its beauty."

Open discussion followed a brief response from Garrett Green until the meeting adjourned at about 6 P.M.

Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity

by Paul D. Molnar

At the Saturday morning session Paul Molnar presented a summary statement of the thesis of his recent book on the Trinity. This was followed by presentations by Cynthia L. Rigby and Jeffrey Hensley. After their presentations and a brief response from Molnar, open discussion followed until 11:30 A.M., when the meeting adjourned. A full record of this discussion will be published in a forthcoming issue of the *Scottish Journal of Theology*.

As you no doubt already observed, this is the first issue of the Karl Barth Society Newsletter to be published without Russ Palmer as Editor in very many years. It is certain that all members join in thanking Russ for his devoted and professional service to this Society and in wishing him well in his retirement. It is an honor for me to assume this responsibility and it is certainly my hope that I can continue the important work that Russ did so tirelessly for so long.

—Paul D. Molnar, Editor

ANNUAL BARTH SOCIETY DUES

Everyone interested in joining the Karl Barth Society of North America is invited to become a member by sending your name, address and annual dues of \$15.00 (\$10.00 for students) to:

Professor Paul D. Molnar
Division of Humanities—Bent Hall
St. John's University
8000 Utopia Parkway
Jamaica, New York 11439
Email: molnarp@stjohns.edu

Checks drawn on a U.S. bank should be made payable to the Karl Barth Society of North America.
Kindly remit by June, 2003.

Wheaton Theology Conference Held at Wheaton College April 10-12, 2003

The Twelfth Annual Wheaton College Theology Conference entitled "The Gospel, Freedom and Righteousness" sponsored by the Wheaton College Graduate School, Department of Bible and Theology and InterVarsity Press was held from Thursday April 10 through Saturday April 12, 2003. It is anticipated that the proceedings will be released in book form by InterVarsity Press sometime during the next year. The meeting featured papers by Donald A. Carson of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and Robert H. Gundry of Westmont College on Thursday morning from 9:00 – 11:00 A.M. The former paper sought to explain the importance of imputation with respect to justification by focusing on Romans, Galatians and 1 Corinthians stressing that God justifies the ungodly and so righteousness does not belong to them inherently but is theirs only in Christ. The latter paper suggested that our sins were imputed to Christ while his righteousness does not come into an imputation of righteousness to us because when Paul speaks of righteousness and Christ the emphasis is on God's righteousness, and that righteousness comes from God. Carson found Gundry's antithesis between God and Christ perplexing.

On Thursday afternoon from 1:00 – 3:00 P.M. the session was devoted to Lutheran and Reformed Perspectives. Papers were presented by Anthony N. S. Lane of London Bible College and Robert Kolb of Concordia Seminary (St. Louis). The former paper entitled "Justified by Worthless Works: A New Look at Calvin's Doctrine" explored the main features of Calvin's view of justification by faith alone focusing on Calvin's forensic view and his distinction between justification and sanctification. We have both through union with Christ with the result that they cannot be separated although they must be distinguished. While we are justified by faith, we cannot actually be justified without hope, love and good works. The works do not create our justification, but where justification exists these works are present as well. Lane focused on the doctrine of double justification suggesting it could prove helpful in ecumenical discussions because it stresses the fact that for Calvin, God accepts not only us but our good works done in faith by overlooking their defects. While Calvin thought of all our works as worthless, his doctrine of double justification leaves the "paradox" of our justification by worthless works. Robert Kolb's paper "Twentieth Century Lutheran Perspectives on Justification" explored two current views of Luther interpretation that were recently presented at the International Congress on Luther Research in Copenhagen: 1) an ecumenical approach and 2) a more traditional

historical approach to the contemporary application of his views. Kolb noted that the "Finnish School" equates Luther's definition of God's justifying action with "theosis" while the second focuses on his view of God's Word as an instrument of re-creation. Kolb noted that the former has been criticized on theological and historical grounds, and another interpretation of Luther that gave rise to the "Joint Declaration" was found to be inadequate by some representatives of both churches. The latter position, it was said, has been held by a variety of Lutherans in recent years who stress the Word of God as the instrument of his creation and who underscore "passive" and "active" righteousness and trust in human identity; this position focuses on Luther's theology of the cross and applies his insights on justification to contemporary questions such as theodicy.

From 3:30 – 5:00 P.M. R. Scott Clark of Westminster Theological Seminary (CA) discussed the theological function of double justification for Luther, Bucer and Calvin with a view toward seeing how justification and sanctification are related and distinguished. Clark argued that all three used the doctrine *duplex iustitia* or *duplex beneficium* to express the Protestant dogma concerning justification, despite the formal similarities with some Roman views of double justice and despite the Regensburg agreement in 1541. Mark A. Seifrid of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary explored the current debate among evangelicals over defining justification as "Christ's imputed righteousness." Seifrid noted the opposing views on this issue expressed by Robert Gundry, who opposed the notion and Tom Oden and John Piper who favored it. Seifrid shed light on the issue from an historical perspective by noting that Melancthon's view of the matter differed from Luther's and that the formula of imputation only arose in connection with the Osiandrist controversy, with the result that it may be regarded as a Protestant formula, but not reformational. Hence there is no need to follow the Melancthonian formula to define justification. Seifrid stresses that Paul seldom speaks of imputation and thinks of justification as believing union with the crucified and risen Christ.

On Friday morning from 8:30 – 10:20 A.M. Protestant and Catholic Perspectives on Justification were presented and discussed. Anthony N. S. Lane of London Bible College explored the agreement produced by three Catholic and three Protestant theologians at Regensburg in 1541 as a possible basis for current ecumenical agreement on the subject. According to Lane, their emphasis on double justification, which quickly became unfashionable after the council of Trent rejected it in 1547, might be worth re-considering today as a way to avoid unbalanced presentations of the

doctrine and as a way to hold together justification and sanctification, forgiveness and repentance as well as free grace and the call to discipleship. Paul D. Molnar of St. John's University then discussed the dogmatic implications of a theology of justification arguing that, while the Joint Declaration exemplified a formal breakthrough by placing the doctrine of justification on a scriptural foundation within the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, there was not much material evidence that contemporary Catholic and Protestant theologians allow their thinking to be shaped by their belief that we are saved by Christ alone. This paper then compared the thought of Karl Rahner and Karl Barth regarding theological method, knowledge of God, the incarnation and the resurrection to show the differences between them in order to suggest that the Joint Declaration cannot realize its full potential without agreement on these important doctrinal concerns as well.

Worship took place in the chapel at 10:30 A.M. This included a sermon on Phil. 2: "work out your salvation in fear and trembling" by Bruce L. McCormack of Princeton Theological Seminary.

In the afternoon session from 1:00 - 3:00 Kenneth Collins of Asbury Seminary in Louisville discussed historical and contemporary views of Wesley's doctrine of justification showing how John Wesley's view was informed by "Catholic" Anglican streams especially in his fear of 1) antinomianism; 2) the importance of works before and after justification; 3) his insistence on nothing less than a "lively faith." His thinking was equally informed by the Reformation emphasis on 1) a doctrine of imputation; 2) distinguishing justification and sanctification; 3) emphasizing the language of *sola fide*. Collins applied these insights to a discussion of the ecumenical promise of the Joint Declaration. Geoffrey Wainwright of Duke University Divinity School then presented a paper exploring ways in which a nuanced view of justification could play out in ecclesiology and how different ecclesiologies affect the doctrine of justification. Wainwright sought to find a scripturally and systematically responsible range of interactions between justification and Church that may lead toward reconciliation of historic divisions and improve our insights into the Gospel.

From 3:30 - 5:00 P.M. two other papers were presented. The first, by Thomas Finger of the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary explored the social dimension of the doctrine of justification arguing that the Bible included social dimensions while also stressing individual justification. The social meaning is less related to structuring large institutions and procedures and more concerned with the life of faith lived out holistically in Christian communities according to this

view. The second paper by Philip G. Ziegler of the Atlantic School of Theology explored and compared the thinking of Reinhold Niebuhr and his student Paul Lehmann by showing how and why Lehmann criticized his teacher for stressing God's transcendence without offering a sufficient Christological determination. This led to a failure to see the proper connection between justification and justice leading to a divorce between soteriology and ethics which has hindered a properly evangelical account of social and political engagement and encouraged recourse to a natural law to orient this engagement. This paper stressed Lehmann's concepts of faith, forgiveness, law and justice and their relation to his christologically structured vision of divine agency with a view toward showing that Lehmann achieved a better idea of righteousness grounded in Christ than Niebuhr could achieve with his formal commitment to divine transcendence. Ziegler finally argued that Christians must take up a struggle for justice which humanly comports with what "God is doing to make and to keep human life human."

In a simultaneous session from 3:30 - 5 P.M. Fred Sanders of Biola University discussed James Hervey's relevance for the contemporary debate about justification by imputation suggesting that many of the contemporary issues had already arisen in the mid-eighteenth century with Hervey's "dialogues" which was popular at the time. Paul C-H. Lim of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary compared Richard Baxter's (1615-1691) view of justification with that of John Owen (1616-1683) to explore the similarity between Baxter's view and the new perspective on Paul, and Owen's view with the more traditional view.

Keynote addresses were given on Thursday and Friday evenings at 7:30. The Thursday address by Donald A. Carson of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School offered a careful exploration, analysis and application of Rom. 3 for contemporary understanding of the doctrine of justification. The Friday address by Bruce L. McCormack of Princeton Theological Seminary was completed in part two on Saturday morning at 8:30 A.M. McCormack presented an historical overview and theological analysis exploring the thought of Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther and John Calvin in order to say that contemporary Reformed theology is in crisis precisely because of its failure to emphasize a proper notion of imputation in its theology of justification; a failure that stems from an inability on the part of Thomas and the Reformers to offer a properly Christian theological ontology that would reflect the fact that we are God's children solely because of the covenant of grace. Both of these keynote addresses were challenging and exciting presentations by two leading theologians

representing Biblical theology and Systematic/ Historical theology, respectively.

The Conference ended with a panel discussion from 10:00 to 11:00 A.M. on Saturday chaired by Dan Treier, followed by closing worship until 11:30 A.M.

All participants were grateful to Dan Treier and Mark Husbands of Wheaton College for organizing and presenting this Conference. Everyone is deeply indebted to them, to Wheaton College and to the editors of InterVarsity Press for making this such a successful and important event.

Barth's Rejection of "War Theology"

by George Hunsinger
Princeton Theological Seminary

It should not be forgotten that Barth first became a theologian in opposition to a "pre-emptive" war. More precisely, he felt compelled to re-examine everything he had learned from his revered teachers because of his fierce opposition to what he called their "war theology"—a theology that turned the gospel to sacralize a war of aggression.

"And then the First World War broke out and brought something which for me was almost even worse than the violation of Belgian neutrality—the horrible manifesto of the ninety-three German intellectuals who identified themselves before all the world with the war policy of Kaiser Wilhelm II and Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg. And to my dismay, among the signatories I discovered the names of almost all my German teachers (with the honorable exception of Martin Rade). An entire world of theological exegesis, ethics, dogmatics, and preaching, which up to that point I had accepted as basically credible, was thereby shaken to the foundations, and with it everything which flowed at that time from the pens of the German theologians."

Not long afterwards, in a step that would lead to the rebirth of 20th century theology, Barth sat down under an apple tree and "began, with all the tools at my disposal, to apply myself to the Epistle to the Romans."

After the outbreak of the war, things did not go smoothly for Barth, even with his teacher Martin Rade, a man of pacifist leanings. Barth had once served as an assistant editor at *Die Christliche Welt*, where Rade was the long-time editor. He responded to Rade's first three war-time issues with a letter of protest. He told him

that the journal had ceased to be Christian and simply gone over to the world. While Barth could see only a debased power struggle and a racist bid for superiority, Rade had been investing the war with a halo of piety.

From a Christian standpoint, "the only possibility at the present moment," said Barth, "would be unconditional protest against war as such and against the human failures that brought it about." Even silence would be better than what Rade had been putting out, if no other form of protest were possible, because even silence would be a form of protest. But Rade was permitting Christians to support the war with a good conscience. "How are people to make progress," asked Barth, "if now, in this terrible explosion of human guilt, their actions are rewarded with the consolation of a good conscience? At the present moment, unless one prefers to keep wholly silent, can anything be said other than 'Repent'?" Barth's own 1914 sermons bristle with protests against "war theology."

Throughout his career Barth was acutely aware of the political meaning of the Third Commandment. Today not only President Bush but also more liberal politicians seem to have not a clue about taking the Lord's name in vain.

As the new war on Iraq was breaking out, a liberal politician who may try to run for President concluded a press release by saying: "God bless our troops and God bless America."

This way of using God's name is blasphemous, as Barth always understood, regardless of where it comes from on the political spectrum.

Let all who would use the Lord's name to bless a war of aggression take this as their text for the day:

"Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God. . . . For your hands are defiled with blood and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies; your tongue mutters wickedness" (Isa. 59:2, 3).

Those who think they can have God's blessing without God's judgment need to think again.

Note: If you have any articles, reviews, news items or other suggestions or information, please send them to the editor:

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